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Title: Cordiality and Intimacy in Contemporary Brazilian Culture: Introduction

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Abstract: This article serves as an introduction to a special issue on intimacy and cordiality in contemporary Brazilian cultural production. It traces these purported “national traits” back to their exploration in Gilberto Freyre’s renowned *Casa grande & senzala* (1933) and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s *Raízes do Brasil* (1936). While Freyre emphasises the formative influence of the close ties between Afro-Brazilian wet-nurses and landowning families in the colonial era, Holanda’s schematisation of the “cordial man” focuses on the sinister consequences of the Brazilian drive towards intimacy. The articles enclosed are informed by Holanda’s suggestion that the country’s colonial heritage and patriarchal culture has complicated the institution of a clear distinction between the private (familial) and public realms. The recent wave of Brazilian cinema and TV series that focuses on the figure of the maid evocatively foregrounds the continuing primacy of intimate relationships in Brazil, and the enduring relevance of Holanda and Freyre’s insights; this includes films by Anna Muylaert and Kleber Mendonça Filho, which are analysed in this issue. The link

between cordiality and cruelty is also explored to provide a context for articles that reflect on the frailties of Brazilian state apparatuses, which have led to social breakdown, and even to the use of coercion or torture.

Keywords: Brazilian cinema, cordiality, domestic workers, Gilberto Freyre, intimacy, maids, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, television.

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Cordiality and Intimacy in Contemporary Brazilian Culture: Introduction

An investigation of cordiality and intimacy in contemporary Brazilian culture must inevitably begin with an exploration of the seminal texts that earned these concepts their status as alleged “national traits”. For this, it is necessary to return to the 1930s when the popularity of culturalist approaches and essayistic academic writing saw the publication of Gilberto Freyre’s renowned *Casa-grande & senzala/The Masters and the Slaves*, in 1933. The book’s Portuguese title refers to the relationship between the landowner’s house and the slave quarters, as it constitutes a study of the domestic arrangements that developed on the sugar plantations in Brazil’s North East between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, Freyre’s text inverted previous conceptions of the role of slaves and Afro-Brazilians in the formation of the Brazilian nation and national identity (2008, 84). It depicted *mestiçagem* (“racial” and cultural mixing) in a relatively optimistic light, approaching it as more of a cultural than a biological phenomenon and, most importantly, “não mais como veneno, e sim como redenção” [no longer as poisonous, but rather as redemptive] (Schwarcz 2008, 84).¹

It was also within this context that Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s *Raízes do Brasil/Roots of Brazil* was published, in 1936. His book, which includes the well-known chapter “O homem cordial” [The Cordial Man], addresses the problematic influence that Brazil’s rural traditions – and hence its legacy of slavery – was having on the country’s ability to modernise during the first half of the twentieth century. Schwarcz suggests that both texts must be read with an eye to their historical context,

¹ Translations into English of articles written in Portuguese are the author’s own, however, English translations of Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa Grande & Senzala* are taken from Samuel Putnam’s *The Masters and the Slaves* (1969).

specifically to the developmentalism and cultural politics of Getúlio Vargas' Estado Novo (1930-1945) (2008, 85). Holanda, like Freyre, examines the implications of Brazil's traditional rural culture for its collective identity, rooting the country's development in its Iberian heritage. However, instead of constructing a positivist history, or drawing on racial or exclusively cultural frameworks, Holanda employs Weberian typologies and dichotomies in his text in order to provide an explanation for Brazil's continuation as a highly unequal society (Schwarcz 2008, 85).²

Casa-grande & senzala

Freyre opens the fourth chapter of *Casa-grande & senzala*, entitled "O escravo negro na vida sexual e de família do brasileiro" [The Negro Slave in the Sexual and Family Life of the Brazilian],³ by affirming that "[t]odo brasileiro, mesmo o alvo, de cabelo louro, traz na alma, quando não na alma e no corpo, [...] a sombra, ou pelo menos a pinta, do indígena ou do negro" (Freyre [1933] 2003, 367) [(e)very Brazilian, even the light-skinned, fair-haired one, carries about with him on his soul, when not on soul and body alike (...) the shadow, or at least the birthmark, of the aborigine or the Negro (Freyre 1969, 255)]. He goes on to focus on the intimate nature of various relationships between landowners and slaves that he considers crucial to Brazil's development as a country distinguished by its fusion of African, indigenous and Portuguese influences, in linguistic, religious, cultural and "racial" terms.

² For further discussion of the relevance of Max Weber's 'ideal types' to Holanda's work, see Schwarcz (2008: 85).

³ English translations of Freyre's *Casa Grande & Senzala* are taken from Samuel Putnam's translation, *The Masters and the Slaves* (1969).

The element of his analysis that has caused particular controversy – and which is of greatest relevance to the articles that comprise this special issue – is Freyre’s suggestion that, although the impact of domestic slavery on the morality and character of Brazilians was deleterious, there were “circunstâncias especialíssimas que entre nos modificaram ou atenuaram os males do sistema” (2003, 435) [highly special circumstances that, in our country, modified or attenuated the evils of the system (1969, 323)]. In this regard, he underscores the importance of “a doçura nas relações de senhores com escravos domésticos, talvez maior no Brasil do que em qualquer outra parte da América” (2003, 435) [the mildness of the relations between masters and household slaves – milder in Brazil, it may be, than in any other part of the Americas (1969, 323)]. He claims that this led to household slaves’ treatment as *pessoas de casa* [members of the household], rather than as slaves (2003, 435). Although translator Samuel Putnam renders “doçura” into English as “mildness”, it could also be translated more literally as “sweetness” or “kindness”. Freyre’s texts have, therefore, been criticised in recent times for supporting the perpetuation of a vision of Brazil as a country characterised by racial harmony, which conceals the reality that black and mixed-race Brazilians are far more likely to be poor and to suffer as a result of racist prejudices (De Luca 2017, 210).

In order to support his conclusion regarding the “doçura” and “intimidade” [intimacy] of the relations between masters and household slaves, Freyre discusses the practice of employing Afro-Brazilian women who were favoured by the landowning family as wet-nurses for the latter’s infants (2003, 435-436). He also suggests that it was very common for European-descendant masters to have extramarital affairs with slaves, which were aided by Brazilian and Portuguese laws that facilitated the adoption of “illegitimate” children (2003, 390). In addition, Freyre

states that, from quite an early age, the landowner's sons were pressured to engage in sexual relationships with the family's slaves, and that black women and *mulatas* were burdened by a popular belief in their promiscuity and capacity to corrupt young men (2003, 398-99; 455-457). Freyre disparages the latter suggestion and emphasises that these relationships were permitted by the highly unequal power relations inherent to slavery (2003, 398-399), and by the intimate master-slave relations that were cultivated from childhood (2003, 459).

His text nonetheless intimates an uncanny link between the care that various female slaves provided for the master's infants and the sexual initiation of the latter as youths, when he writes that the domestic intimacy between slaves and landowners led almost all Brazilians to bear

a marca da influência negra. Da escrava ou sinhama que nos embalou. Que nos deu de mamar. Que nos deu de comer, ela própria amolengando na mão o bolão de comida. Da negra velha que nos contou as primeiras histórias de bicho e de mal-assombrado. Da mulata que nos tirou o primeiro bicho-de-pé de uma coceira tão boa. Da que nos iniciou no amor físico e nos transmitiu, ao ranger da cama-de-vento, a primeira sensação completa de homem. (2003, 367)

[the mark of (African) influence. Of the female slave or “mammy” who rocked us to sleep. Who suckled us. Who fed us, mashing our food with her own hands. The influence of the old woman who told us our first tales of ghost and *bicho*.⁴ Of the mulatto girl who relieved us of our first *bicho de pé*,⁵ of a

⁴ In this context *bicho* could be translated as ‘monster’, but can refer to any animal.

⁵ Putnam explains that a *bicho de pé* is a type of flea that burrows beneath the skin of the foot and lays its eggs there (Freyre 1963, 278).

pruriency that was so enjoyable. Who initiated us into physical love and, to the creaking of a canvas cot, gave us our first complete sensation of being a man. (1969, 255)]

As David Lehmann has pointed out, this passage reveals the author's subject position, as a member of the cultural "elite" in Brazil's North East (2008, 209). In the text, he aligns himself with the "nos" [us] about whom it is written and to whom it is addressed: an upper-class, predominantly white readership (Lehmann 2008, 209). Freyre's text, then, while clearly condemnatory of the abusive relationships incited by slavery, also betrays a problematic sense of nostalgia for the domestic intimacy that, he suggests, characterised various relationships between landowners and slaves. The text at times displays a yearning for affective or sexual ties that relied on an extremely exploitative socio-economic system.

As this passage also demonstrates, Freyre uses vocabulary that stresses the 'softening' effects that African or Afro-descendant wet-nurses had in their physical and emotional relationships with their young charges. He repeatedly uses the word "amolengar" (2003, 367; 419), which is translated as "to mash" with reference to the child's food (1969, 255; 303), and "amaciar" and "amolecer" (2003, 391; 414), which are employed when describing the way that these women's language softened European Portuguese in Brazil (2003, 414-415). He thus emphasises the importance of the close relationships between the enslaved "mães-pretas" (2003, 435) ["black mammies" (1969, 324)] and the landowner's children for the formation of Brazilian culture and language during the colonial era, concluding that these women occupied "o lugar verdadeiramente de honra [...] no seio das famílias patriarcais" (2003, 435) [a place of honor (...) in the bosom of the patriarchal family (1969, 324)].

It is clear that Afro-Brazilian women's bodies take on a particularly critical role within a Freyrian – or lusotropical – schema of racial miscegenation, which has assumed a quasi-mythological status in popular understandings of Brazilian national identity. His arguments have been echoed by Luiz Felipe Alencastro, who – when describing a well-known photograph depicting Artur Gomes Leal with his wet-nurse Mônica in Recife in 1860 (prior to the abolition of slavery in 1888) – stated that “quase todo o Brasil cabe nessa foto” [almost all of Brazil fits within this photo] (1997, 440). Along with Freyre's narrative, Alencastro's statement – which has, in turn, been cited by director Consuelo Lins in her recent documentary short *Babás/Nannies* (2010) – demonstrates that the surrogate mother embodied by the *mãe-preta* [black mammy] has been hailed, at various different historical moments, as a foundational figure in terms of Brazilian national identity (Randall 2018b).

“O homem cordial”

In his analysis of Holanda's *Raízes do Brasil*, Pedro Meira Monteiro has stated that the book “é incompreensível sem a sombra de Gilberto Freyre, mais abrangente e acolhedora do que muitas vezes se quer fazer crer” [is incomprehensible without referring to the shadow cast by Gilberto Freyre, whose work is more influential and all-encompassing than is frequently believed] (2015, 4). Freyre's description of the overtly patriarchal structures established on the colonial sugar plantations provides a grounding for Holanda's assertions that in Brazil it has historically been a struggle to maintain a separation between the public and private realms. In this instance, the private sphere refers to the domestic and familial domain, while everything that lies beyond this, including public regulation and private enterprise (or “civil society”)

pertains to the public sphere. The blurring of the two is a recurrent theme throughout the articles that comprise this edition.

A clear example of the way in which the patriarchal slave-owning society described in *Casa grande & senzala* failed to distinguish between public, professional relationships and private, personal ones is documented by Freyre when he observes that one of the reasons sexual relationships between the landowner's sons and enslaved women were so strongly encouraged was because if the slave fell pregnant, her offspring automatically became part of the landowner's estate (Freyre 2003, 456). As Carole Pateman has argued, the distinction between the public and private spheres is a relatively recent one, through which our modern notion of society was instituted by the contract theorists (1989, 34). In "The Fraternal Social Contract", Pateman observes that patriarchy ("the traditional world order of father-kings") is often represented as having been defeated by the modern "contract theorists", whose ideas paved the way for "capitalist society, liberal representative government and the modern family" (1989, 36). They argued that all men were born free and equal, rather than naturally subject to their fathers.

Holanda laments the fact that this modern distinction between the public and the private had not been thoroughly established in Brazilian society in the 1930s. It is a difficulty that he suggests can be traced back to the country's patriarchal, rural culture, in which it was the norm for political power and influence to be concentrated in the hands of a few landowners (2014, 85-86). He argues, furthermore, that this colonial legacy has been inherited by Brazil's rapidly growing cities. Consequently, he concludes that "[n]o Brasil, pode dizer-se que só excepcionalmente tivemos um sistema administrativo e um corpo de funcionários puramente dedicados a interesses objetivos e fundados nesses interesses" [in Brazil, it is possible to argue that only

exceptionally have we had an administrative system, and a civil service, that was solely dedicated to objective interests and founded upon those interests] ([1936] 2014, 175). On the contrary, Brazil's history has been characterised by the constant predominance of private over public interests, in particular by the “supremacia incontestável, absorvente, do núcleo familiar” [incontestable, all encompassing supremacy of the family nucleus], which has resulted in “laços de sangue e (...) as relações que se criam na vida doméstica” [blood ties and (...) domestic relationships] providing the principal model for social relationships (2014, 176).

Holanda argues that these relationships take precedence even within democratic institutions founded upon theoretically neutral and abstract principles (2014, 176). His suggestion that the dominance of personalism within Brazilian politics weakens the country's public institutions remains pertinent today amid the relentless corruption scandals that embroil the political class. The continual slippage between the public and the private (or domestic) was clearly illustrated when various *deputados* [political representatives] who voted for former president Dilma Rousseff's suspension prior to impeachment proceedings claimed that they were doing so in the name of their children or grandchildren, and therefore to protect their private or familial interests (Santos 2016).

The fact that commercial, bureaucratic and political relationships appear to be inseparable from personal – even familial – ties is related to Holanda's definition of the “homem cordial” [cordial man], which has come to constitute an archetype of Brazilian national culture and character. The concept – which as Schwarcz suggests is as frequently cited as it is misunderstood (2008, 83) – is related to the importance of establishing *intimate* relationships with others (Holanda 2014, 178-180). Making reference to Cassiano Ricardo's prior (and distinct) use of the term, Holanda writes

that, this “expressão feliz” [fortunate expression] has already (mistakenly) been employed to suggest that Brazil’s contribution to civilisation would be that of cordiality, which encompasses the traits of kindness, hospitality and generosity often praised by foreign visitors to the country (2014, 176). In a footnote, Holanda meticulously distinguishes his use of the term from Ricardo’s, stating that cordiality must be understood by drawing on its etymological root in the word *cordis*: of the heart. He explains that “[a] inimizade bem pode ser tão *cordial* quanto a amizade, nisto que uma e outra nascem do *coração*, procedem assim, da esfera do íntimo, do familiar, do privado” [enmity can certainly be as *cordial* as friendship, in that both originate in the heart, hence they develop from the intimate, the familial and the private] (2014, 241).

Holanda acknowledges that the virtues identified by Ricardo represent an element of Brazilian national character, but that it would be misleading to assume that they result in “boas maneiras” [good manners] (2014, 176). Once again, he emphasises that these characteristics endure to the extent that social interactions are shaped by a prevailing patriarchal, rural culture (2014, 176). For Holanda, cordiality does not refer to politeness or civility, but rather to an abhorrence of distant – even formal, or ritualistic – relationships (2014, 180). As Schwarcz has pointed out, far from what might appear to be its logical definition, the term relates more closely to the idea of intimacy and, in particular, to the extreme difficulties of addressing political issues and questions of citizenship outside of the sphere of the personal (2008, 86). For this reason, Holanda concludes that liberal democracy’s principles were only assimilated by the Brazilian political system to the extent that they could be moulded to foster familiarity with representatives, and to avoid overly hierarchical structures (2014, 192).

“O mulato cordial”

Unlike Freyre, Holanda believed that the process of modernisation would dispense with both the “cordial man” and the primacy of intimate relationships in Brazil’s public sphere. He argued that those who imagined that a return to tradition represented the only defence against disorder were deeply mistaken (2014, 38), and warned that while a socio-economic model inherited from the colonial era continued to be dominant, any changes to Brazilian society would remain superficial (Holanda 2014, 214-215).

However, Monteiro suggests that the most valuable element of Holanda’s insight are his observations regarding the irresolvable nature of the conflict between the public and private spheres (2015, 5). This represents a contrast to Freyre, in whose work “o *compromisso* ressurge na figuração de um *mulato cordial*” [compromise reappears in the figuration of a cordial *mulato*] (Monteiro 2015, 5). This is implied by the importance Freyre placed on the figure of wet-nurse or “black mammy”, in particular (discussed above). As Monteiro emphasises, “[n]a promessa do mulato está contida a sedução que as teses freyrianas podem ainda despertar nestes tempos de discussão acalorada, no Brasil, sobre ação afirmativa e o espinhoso tema da miscigenação” [the promise represented by the figure of the *mulato* is indicative of the seductive potential that Freyrian thought continues to have in Brazil today, during heated discussions about affirmative action and the thorny topic of miscegenation] (2015, 5-6). “Affirmative action” refers to the approval of the “Lei de Cotas” [Quota Law] by Brazil’s supreme court in August 2012, which obliges the country’s public higher education institutions to reserve a certain proportion of the places available for

a mixture of non-white, low-income and state-school students.⁶ The measure, which has provoked polemical public debates, is designed to ensure that a greater number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds can access Brazil's prestigious public universities, at which places are gained by sitting a highly competitive entrance exam.

In his discussion of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, Holanda observes that, “[e]m todas as culturas, o processo pelo qual a lei geral suplanta a lei particular faz-se acompanhar de crises mais ou menos graves e prolongadas, que podem afetar profundamente a estrutura da sociedade” [in all cultures, the process by which public law supersedes private interests is accompanied by crises that are more or less serious and prolonged, and which can deeply affect social structures] (2014, 170). Perhaps for this reason, Holanda's prescience reached its limit when he foresaw the decline of the cordial man as a result of modernisation. In this eponymous chapter, he analyses the changes that have affected industrial labour relations in the early twentieth century. He distinguishes old corporations from the modern industrial system. In the former he suggests that the boss, apprentices and workers practically formed a “family”, whose members were subject to a “natural hierarchy”, and who shared in the same comforts and deprivations (Holanda 2014, 170). In the latter, Holanda observes that the manufacturing process separates employers and employees, whose functions are increasingly differentiated. He adds that “[p]ara o empregador moderno [...] o empregado transforma-se em um simples número: a relação humana desapareceu” [for the modern employer (...) the employee is transformed into a mere statistic: the human relationship between them has disappeared] (Holanda 2014, 170-71).

Domestic workers in Brazil

⁶ See: *Lei de Cotas para o Ensino Superior* (2012).

Holanda's schema is not applicable to domestic labour relationships in Brazil, such as those between employers and maids, many of whom are still treated (or may see themselves as) *almost* a member of their boss' family. Within Marxist theory, domestic work has been similarly overlooked: questions regarding whether this kind of labour can be seen as creating value led to it being viewed as economically unproductive. The fact that the "products" created by domestic work are not destined for the market, but rather immediately consumed, lent weight to the view that this kind of labour only generates use value, not exchange value (Secombe 1975, 86).

In Brazil, it is clear that modern-day domestic labour relationships developed from slavery, which was only abolished in 1888. Following this, a scarcity of alternative employment led many Afro-descendant women to take up paid service positions (Roncador 2014, 6). Today, Brazil has the greatest number of domestic workers in the world (Wentzel 2018), 93% of whom are women and the majority of whom are black (Cornwall et al. 2013, 149).⁷ Consequently, even now, relationships between employers and maids continue to be characterised by the intimacy powerfully evoked by Freyre, but they are simultaneously marked by class distinctions and distance. The nature of these relations has the potential to compound domestic workers' subjugation and exploitation. As Schwarcz emphasises in her analysis of Holanda's work, the familiarity, kindness and politeness that have been viewed as constituting Brazilian "cordiality", can also function as forms of coercion and may conceal more traditional, or deeply-rooted, forms of sociability and of

⁷ In 2017, there were around seven million domestic workers in Brazil; India has the second greatest number of domestic workers globally, although the ILO acknowledges that many workers in India are not registered and, given the size of the country, the true total could surpass Brazil's (Wentzel 2018).

hierarchy that are enforced within the private sphere (2008, 86), namely through relationships to maids or nannies. In this sense, domestic labour relationships can function as a clear continuation of the cordiality and intimacy described and explored by Freyre and Holanda.

Similarly to the heated debates that have surrounded the introduction of university quotas, recent improvements in the rights afforded to domestic workers have provoked something of a public outcry, as Holanda's comments about the conflict between public law and private interests predicted. Following the introduction of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Domestic Workers' Convention (2011), Brazil's Workers' Party administration, led by Rousseff, approved a constitutional amendment relating to domestic work in 2013. The amendment limited the number of working hours per week, guaranteed the right to overtime pay, and introduced the requirement that employers pay a proportion of their employee's salary into a government severance fund, which is meant to protect the latter in the case of unfair dismissal (*The Economist* 2014). It was followed by the approval of a second complementary law in 2015, and Brazil's ratification of the ILO Convention in 2018 (Wentzel 2018). Although the 2013 amendment sought to protect those involved in domestic labour by conceding them similar rights to other workers, the changes were viewed as contentious by some and provoked polemical reactions, particularly online.⁸ During an anti-government protest that took place prior to former president

⁸ Stephanie Dennison discusses the memes inspired by these changes in her article in this special issue. Another example includes a photograph taken in 2016, which shows the financial director of Rio de Janeiro football club Flamengo, his wife and children on an anti-government protest: the children were escorted on the protest by their family's 'Sunday maid'. Shortly after the image had been shared on Facebook, it

Rousseff's impeachment in August 2016, one protester was photographed with a placard that read: "Não consigo mais empregadas que durmam no emprego. Maldito Lula!" [I can't find "live-in" maids anymore. Goddamn Lula!]⁹ Indeed, it has been implied that Rousseff's support of reforms to domestic labour laws and association with the National Federation of Domestic Workers (Fenetrad) may have contributed to her political downfall.¹⁰

Brazil's recent economic downturn, together with the legal changes approved in 2012 and 2015, have made it more expensive to employ a "live-in" maid. Both the improvements in domestic workers' rights, and the strong public reactions to them, indicate that socio-cultural attitudes towards domestic work are evolving in Brazil. It is becoming more common for domestic workers, termed "diaristas" [day-workers], only to offer specific services, rather than to reside with an employer-family and handle all household tasks. These developments have created public uneasiness

had received 12,600 likes (*Correio Braziliense* 2016), and it was held up as evidence, by many, of the privileged socio-economic background of many who participated in the protests that clamoured for the end of Rousseff's Worker's Party administration.

⁹ This refers to Rousseff's predecessor Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, who previously led Brazil's PT government (2003 and 2011).

¹⁰ Rousseff shared a platform with the President of Fenetrad, Creuza Maria de Oliveira, when she was facing impeachment proceedings. Oliveira pledged her loyalty to Rousseff, stating "mexeu com ela, mexeu connosco" [you mess with her, you mess with us] (see Palácio do Planalto 2016). A possible relationship between Rousseff's support for domestic workers' rights and her impeachment has also been alluded to on social media networks, including in a poem by Herton Gustavo Gratto, which has been performed in a YouTube video (see Costa 2016).

precisely because they have provoked fears about the need to reorganise middle- and upper-class domestic and family life (Randall 2018b), as well as aggravating existing social and political tensions. They demonstrate how the conditions of domestic work and expectations of domestic labourers can foreground the complex relationship between the private and public realms and, in particular, the way that the domestic (familial) sphere often appears to subsume the properly political sphere in Brazil (Randall 2018b).

Within this context, maids have become somewhat “contentious” socio-cultural figures in Brazil in recent years, and a plethora of cultural productions have, consequently, begun to explore the intimacy and tensions that characterise domestic labour relationships, as well as these workers’ importance for the running of a variety of Brazilian homes. The emotional bonds between employers and domestic employees, and the exploitative practices these relationships simultaneously aid, constitute a kind of affective paradox, which has been compellingly depicted in several recent Brazilian films and documentaries, including: *Domésticas/Maids* (dir. Fernando Meirelles, 2001), *Santiago* (dir. João Moreira Salles, 2007), *O som ao redor/Neighbouring Sounds* (dir. Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2009), *Recife Frio/Cold Recife* (dir. Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2009), *Babás/Nannies* (dir. Consuelo Lins, 2010), *Trabalhar Cansa/Hard Labor* (dir. Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra, 2011), *Doméstica/Housemaids* (dir. Gabriel Mascaro, 2012), *Casa grande* (dir. Fellipe Barbosa, 2014), *Que horas ela volta?/The Second Mother* (dir. Anna Muylaert, 2015), *Aquarius* (dir. Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2016), and *Boas Maneiras/Good Manners* (dir. Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra, 2017).¹¹ Several of the films incorporate

¹¹ The intimacy and distance that characterise domestic employee-employer relationships has also been insightfully analysed by Deborah Shaw in her examination

allusions to the way in which the legacy of slavery in Brazil continues to weigh on modern-day domestic labour relations, which has fomented the portrayal of “spectral” live-in maid characters (Randall 2018b), in the films of Kleber Mendonça Filho, in particular. The documentaries produced by Lins and Mascaro have been read both as painful, self-reflexive recognitions of personal privilege, and as “experimental ethnographies”, which purposefully defamiliarise the unequal power relationships between employer-families and domestic workers (Randall 2018b).

Both the fact that many domestic workers have migrated to the urban south in search of employment from Brazil’s North East, and the enduring cultural association of the region with the legacy of the slave-owning era (perhaps partly as a consequence of Freyre’s work), appears to have influenced the portrayal of maids in contemporary Brazilian cinema. *O som ao redor*, which is set in Recife, opens with images of an old sugar mill, while the maid-protagonist Val in *Que horas ela volta?*, who comes from Pernambuco, is given a regional accent by actress Regina Casé. In *Casa grande*, the housekeeper Rita is not Afro-Brazilian, but is also identified with the country’s plantation-based history through her North-Eastern accent and association with the family’s other domestic servants, Severino and Noemia, who are both darker-skinned. This film’s conclusion reveals that all three workers reside in a Rio de Janeiro *favela*, which represents a stark visual contrast to the mansion owned by their employer-family in the city’s south zone.

As Lúcia Sá observes in her article in this issue, in most regions, many domestic servants reside in poorer areas or the urban peripheries. “These are urban areas generally feared by the middle-class populations”; they are “‘no-go’ parts of the

of the Argentine films *La mujer sin cabeza/The Headless Woman* (dir. Lucrecia Martel 2008) and *El niño pez/The Fish Child* (dir. Lucía Puenzo 2009).

cities, which the better-off tend to avoid”. Sá adds that the increase in urban violence since the 1980s and a widespread use of firearms, often as a result of drug-related conflicts, has created a general atmosphere of paranoia, in which those who live in wealthier parts of the city fear the poor. The dependence on domestic service, however, creates a paradox, in which poorer individuals are often feared as a result of an association with danger or criminality, but the middle- and upper-classes remain dependent on employees who come from “marginal” areas. In an analysis of gated communities, Teresa Caldeira has pointed out that residents “[a]nseiam por encontrar maneiras mais eficientes de controlar essas pessoas que lhes prestam serviços e com quem mantêm relações tão ambíguas de dependência e evitação, intimidade e desconfiança” [are desperate to find more efficient ways of controlling the people that do domestic work for them, with whom they maintain highly ambiguous relationships characterised by dependence and avoidance, intimacy and mistrust] (Caldeira 1997, 161)

The film *Casa grande* evocatively explores this dynamic, as well as the “awkward synthesis of sexual and maternal connotations” that frequently typify male adolescents’ relationships to live-in maids in recent Latin American films (Randall 2018a). Teen protagonist Jean repeatedly pressures housekeeper Rita for physical intimacy and she takes pleasure in teasing him by describing her sexual exploits and allowing him to rub moisturiser into her legs, but refusing him sex. Like the maid-protagonist of Sebastián Silva’s *La nana* (Chile 2009), Rita torments Jean by reminding him that she will change his semen-stained sheets, although it appears that she also enjoys his attempts at flirtation. Even in *Que horas ela volta?*, which depicts Val’s relationship to Fabinho as predominantly motherly, Val submits to Fabinho’s requests for massages and allows him to sleep beside her in her single bed. The

portrayal of these relationships is foreshadowed by Freyre's comments about the colonial period, when he writes "já houve quem insinuasse a possibilidade de se desenvolver das relações íntimas da criança branca com a ama-de-leite negra muito do pendor sexual que se nota pelas mulheres de cor no filho-família dos países escravocratas" (2003: 367-368) [there have been others who have hinted at the possibility that the inclination to colored women to be observed in the son of the family in slave-owning countries is a development out of the intimate relations of the white child with its Negro wet-nurse (1963: 278)]. However, in *Casa grande*, Rita's delight in recounting her sexual escapades to Jean risks converting her into a humorous, sex-crazed caricature, and thus of associating her with the adolescent male fantasy of the "randy maid", which reached its problematic cinematic zenith in the *pornochanchadas* (sexual comedies) popular in Brazil during the 1970s, namely in *Como é boa nossa empregada/How good our maid is* (dir. Ismar Porto & Victor di Mello 1973) (Dennison and Shaw 2004, 158-163).

Contemporary filmic and televisual representations of maids have tended to be more nuanced, and to display a greater concern for these workers' vulnerability both to emotional and labour exploitation. In this special issue, the complex (even paradoxical) nature of the cordial and intimate relationships between domestic workers and their employers in Brazil are the focus of articles by Lúcia Nagib, Stephanie Dennison and Gui Perdigão. Their analyses, together with those undertaken by Sônia Roncador (2014), Deborah Shaw (2017), Tiago de Luca (2017) and Rachel Randall (2018a; 2018b), constitute an important recognition and exploration of the significant, emerging interest in domestic work and domestic workers in Latin American cultural production. All of their articles draw on Freyre and Holanda's frameworks, demonstrating that although their theories may appear "outdated", as

Perdigão notes, their contribution to our ability to understand contemporary Brazilian society and culture remains critical.

Lúcia Sá's examination of *Que horas ela volta?*/*The Second Mother* (dir. Anna Muylaert, 2015) combines filmic analysis with the author's personal experiences in order to explore the ways that the film evocatively conveys the ambiguities and complexities of domestic employee-employer relationships in Brazil, in particular through its *mise-en-scène*, which foregrounds tacit feelings and attitudes. Sá observes that maid-protagonist Val's intimate relationship to her employer-family hinges on her "status as not belonging", in terms of class and education, which is nonetheless challenged by the arrival of her daughter Jéssica. With reference to Roncador, Sá argues that the historical moment, early in the twentieth century, when former slaves moved out of masters' abodes into other urban areas intensified suspicion of them. The fact that many employees no longer lived where they worked complicated their status as an extension of the "clã familiar" [family group] and increased employer mistrust, which appeared to foment literary representations of "a figura do empregado invasor, um estranho no meio familiar" [the figure of the employee-intruder, an outsider within the family milieu] at that time (Roncador 2007, 130). Sá concludes that integral to the relationship between bosses and domestic workers is the "tension between dependency and suspicion" – a "cordial", and "potentially explosive" combination, which precipitates boss Bárbara's symbolic physical and emotional breakdown before the film's conclusion.

The breakdown in superficial kindness and politeness between employer and employee that occurs at the end of *Que horas ela volta?* finds a counterpart in Kleber Mendonça Filho's second feature-length film *Aquarius* (2016), as shown in Stephanie Dennison's article, which analyses maid-mistress relationships in the director's

oeuvre. Once again, the “dramatic undoing” of superficially benevolent and intimate relationships is provoked by a perceived threat to an entrenched, naturalised master-subaltern hierarchy. Dennison thus interprets *Aquarius* as “a contemporary revision of the well-worn myths of intimacy and cordiality in Brazilian culture”, and emphasises that Freyre’s description of slave-master relations on sugar plantations in Pernambuco are particularly pertinent to Mendonça’s films, which are set in Recife (the state capital). In *Aquarius*, the director endeavours to “weave” a discussion of the legacy of sugar plantation culture for modern-day social relations in Recife into the film’s very “fabric” through various cultural references to cordiality, including the use of Heitor Villa Lobos’ “Canções de Cordialidade” [Songs of Cordiality]. Dennison concludes that while protagonist Clara strives to be progressive, she is constrained by the socio-cultural traditions that determine her relationship to her maid Ladjane, and her memories of a former domestic employee. Her reliance in the film on the “vices” identified by Holanda, “of personalism, patronage and nepotism”, demonstrate “the ways in which Brazil’s cordial ‘past’ flows into its present”.

Gui Perdigão examines the relationships between bosses and domestic employees portrayed in Brazilian film and television adaptations of canonical Portuguese writer Eça de Queirós’ novels *Os Maias/The Maias* (1888) and *O Primo Basílio/Cousin Bazilio* (1878). His analysis shows that in a mini-series based on *Os Maias* (dir. Luiz Fernando 2000) and in film and television adaptations of *O Primo Basílio* (dir. Daniel Filho, 1988 and 2007), the servant characters gain greater symbolic prominence, both at the level of *mise-en-scène* and plot, than they are afforded in the novels. The emotional ties between masters and servants are also dwelt upon, with “ample screen time” given to the physical contact and caring words shared between them. However, Perdigão observes that other facets of the employees’

characters, including the implications of their class provenance, are not explored in any greater depth in the films than they are in the novels. The emotional significance that servants hold for their employers in the adaptations appears designed to facilitate the spectators' empathy with the latter. Perdigão concludes that "[i]n transforming these servants into 'pessoas de casa' [members of the household]", these adaptations adopt the pretense of being "more class-diverse (and in one case, race-diverse)" than Queirós' novels, but in fact they are not. While the novels openly delineate secondary servant characters from the privileged protagonists, the "perverse cordiality" portrayed in their interactions in Brazilian film and television are designed to make it appear that the employees enjoy an esteemed status within patriarchal families, which is precisely the problematic "'privilege' Freyre thought domestic slaves had in Brazilian colonial society".

Cruelty and Cordiality

Many of the cultural productions analysed in the special issue can be read as a refusal to forget the colonial context that continues to weigh on modern Brazilian society. In her article, Jane-Marie Collins argues that Machado de Assis' short story "Pai contra mãe" [Father versus Mother], which opens with a description of torture apparatus, operates not only as "a blunt reminder" of past cruelties, but also as a warning about "the cruel collective act of forgetting in the present". In sum, she writes, Machado's text forces us to reflect on what happens "when technologies of power become disconnected from the practices they originally performed", or if the social structures and mentalities that legitimated those practices "outlive the system itself". Even though the slave-owning society described by Freyre has ceased to exist, elements of the cordial, rural traditions that marked it have survived to the present day, alongside

processes of modernisation. As Álvaro André Zeini Cruz notes in this special issue, this has made the experience of Brazilian modernity “ambiguous”, since modernity *apriori* (as anticipated by Holanda) “should counteract the values that preceded it”. Cruz refers to Monteiro (2015), who illustrates the coexistence of modernity and tradition in Brazil by reflecting on the rich urban *sobrados* (colonial houses) that began to replace the *casas grandes* described by Freyre.

This process has resulted in what could be viewed a “cruel modernity”, to borrow Jean Franco’s term (2013). Although Holanda believed that Brazil’s social ills could be redeemed by modernisation, the pursuit and “lure of modernity” led various Latin American states to kill (Franco 2013, 2). Franco observes that an intense anxiety to modernise, in the ways determined and represented by North America and Europe, frequently encouraged Latin American administrations to circumvent “the arduous paths of democratic decision making”, at the same time “marginalizing indigenous and black peoples” (2013, 2). States of exception and states of siege followed, not only justifying “the suppression of groups deemed subversive or alien to modernity”, but also fostering a context in which “cruelty was enabled in the name of state security” (2013, 2). Franco continues that in many areas within the region, legal restraints on the ill treatment of descendants of slaves (and indigenous peoples) have been flouted (2013, 5). Her statement recalls the previous discussion of the conditions in which domestic workers in Brazil have laboured, and which have only recently begun to be better regulated. In terms that echo Holanda’s, she states that “[i]n many Latin American nations, ‘there was an iron-clad civility for the privileged few, and violence against the underprivileged masses was a routine affair’” (Franco 2013, 9). The relationship between cordiality and cruelty is explored in this special issue by Collins, Cruz and Tori Holmes, all of whom meditate on the repercussions of the

inability of state mechanisms to resolve public dilemmas effectively, which leads to corruption, coercion, and even social breakdown or the employment of torture.

Álvaro André Zeini Cruz' article examines two Brazilian telenovelas, *Renascer/Reborn* (1993) and *Velho Chico/Old River* (2016), which are united by the prominence of cordial relationships, as described by Holanda. Both take place on feudal farmsteads and revolve around patriarchal families dominated by "cordial fathers", whose affective and economic relations overlap, enabling intimate ties to determine events across entire estates. Cruz' analysis nonetheless contrasts the two series: while *Renascer* portrays a "more purely cordial world", in the transference of traditional values from father to son, in *Velho Chico* the status quo is somewhat undermined by an emerging ecological modernity, which is signalled at the telenovela's conclusion. Both telenovelas were broadcast during moments of tension for Brazil's democratic institutions, at around the time that the impeachment processes of two former presidents (Fernando Collor de Mello and Dilma Rousseff) were respectively taking place. Cruz concludes that, at both moments, *Globo* (Brazil's largest media conglomerate) transmitted the implicit, Freyrian message that "if the crises of the public sphere seem at times unresolvable, the 'sacred' familial institution is the safest place, since, even if it also has its instabilities, these are oscillations always capable of being solved through intimacy".

In her article, Jane-Marie Collins explores the semiotics of a form of torture known as *pau de arara* [parrot's perch] in Brazilian history, politics and culture, from its inception in Brazilian visual culture in the work of French artist Jean-Baptiste Debret during the nineteenth-century, through to its memorialisation in the installation "Tortura Nunca Mais" [Torture Never Again], and its recent inclusion in the Netflix series *3%* (2016). The *pau de arara* consists of a bar on which the victim is suspended

from the back of his knees, with his hands tied to his ankles; the victim, who is usually stripped naked, is then subject to beatings, electric shocks and near-drowning. During military rule (1964-1985), it was the most common form of torture used against political prisoners, although this was refuted by the authorities, who wished to project an image of the nation as “civilised”. Collins explores the ways in which various cultural productions reflect on the cruelty of forgetting, and force viewers to remember the mechanisms of torture and control upon which Brazil was founded, and which “resemble the violence and coercion that continue in Brazil today”. Henry Giroux’s investigation of cultures of cruelty is employed in order to articulate “the convergence of power, politics and everyday life”, and the threats to democracy that this can represent. His framework dovetails with Holanda’s problematisation of the way in which the political, public domain has historically been subsumed within the sphere of personal or familial relationships in Brazil. Collins cites João Reis, who has commented on the relationship between current Brazilian labour laws and working practices that are analogous to slavery, concluding that “[t]he normalisation of concepts of cruelty has rendered Western democracies weakened to the point of being unable to resist socio-economic conditions and relations that resemble (or parrot) slavery in the present”.

Tori Holmes’ analysis of Maria Ramos’ documentary *Futuro Junho* (2015) is guided by the theme of circulation. Holmes observes that one of the film’s protagonists, a financial analyst, claims that for Brazil to overcome its current economic and social crises, it must choose either to progress or to return to its old ways. The analyst elucidates his statement by referring to Holanda’s conception of Brazilian cordiality, which, he states, is “uma estratégia para o indivíduo circular onde público e privado se confundem” [a strategy for the individual to circulate where

public and private overlap]. The documentary has been praised for its “sociological” and “anthropological” examination of the origins of Brazil’s current difficulties, allowing the audience to reflect on a period in 2013-14 when social tensions and economic problems related to the country’s greatly anticipated emergence on to the global stage – via its hosting of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics – were beginning to make themselves felt. Holmes emphasises that the film relates economic circulation to its urban counterpart; even its title, which refers both to economic “futures” and to the month of June, directs attention to the moment when Brazil’s future began to appear less promising, as a result of the urban protests that began in June 2013, which were initially sparked by a hike in public bus fares. Although the film’s editing posits links between its four protagonists, who are like “cogs in the same economic and urban circulatory systems”, a focus on the distinct dwellings and neighbourhoods inhabited by each character “reveals disparity, and difference”. Holmes concludes that, ultimately, the film does not provide resolution, but rather invites “critical reflection on the national conjuncture, via its subtle meditation on economic and urban circulation”.

In sum, the articles contained in this special issue dialogue with each other in order to reflect on Brazil’s contemporary national conjuncture with reference to a variety of cultural productions, all of which are interpreted by drawing on Freyre and Holanda’s paradigmatic frameworks of intimacy and cordiality. While Sá, Dennison and Perdigão’s articles focus on the intimacy and suspicion that characterise depictions of domestic employee-employer relations, Cruz, Collins and Holmes’ contributions are united by their explorations of moments of crisis, socio-political breakdown or repression, which can be elucidated via recourse to the concept of cordiality. Each article adopts different disciplinary approaches to explore these

themes, taken from film and television studies, visual culture, history and anthropology. However, all the articles are permeated by a sense that contemporary Brazilian cultural production continues to wrestle with the blurring between the familial and public realms, and with antagonistic impulses towards both tradition and modernity.

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